
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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| Property Address: | 650 New York Avenue, NW | X | Agenda |
| Landmark/District: | Mount Vernon Square Historic District | | Consent Calendar |
| Meeting Date: | May 31, 2012 | X | Concept Review |
| H.P.A. Number: | 12-305 | X | Alteration |
| Staff Reviewer: | Steve Callcott, David Maloney | X | New Construction |
| | | X | Demolition |
| | | X | Subdivision |

Douglas Development Corporation, represented by Shalom Baranes Associates (architects) and EHT Traceries (preservation consultants), seeks conceptual review for a project involving historic building renovation, relocation and possible demolition, and construction of a new office building in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District. The project is being submitted early in the applicant's planning process in order to obtain the Board's guidance as the proposal continues to develop; the plans have also continued to evolve in response to HPO comments since submitted to the Board on May 17th.

Property Description and History

The Mount Vernon Square Historic District is comprised of residential, commercial, religious and manufacturing buildings, and represents one of two remaining fragments of a formerly continuous neighborhood that was centered around Mount Vernon Square. Its earliest working-class residential buildings date from before the Civil War when the area stood on the fringe of the developed city; by the mid-19th century, the area grew into an economically and racially mixed neighborhood served by the public market in the square and the streetcar line along 7th Street. By the early 20th century, the character of the neighborhood began to shift as auto repair shops, laundries and warehouses sprang up along the increasingly busy New York Avenue. It includes 429 contributing buildings that were constructed within a period of significance between 1845-1945.

The property is located in Square 450, bounded by New York Avenue on the south, 7th Street on the west, L Street on the north and 6th Street on the east. The site contains several vacant parcels as well as 13 contributing buildings along its frontages on New York Avenue (three buildings), L Street (five buildings), and 7th Street (five buildings). They include several Victorian-era mercantile buildings, a carriage warehouse, a livery stable, a pre-Civil War residence later converted to a commercial building, several warehouses, the original Barker Lumber Company Building, and the Art Deco-styled Walker Thomas Furniture store.

Proposal

The project calls for retaining and rehabilitating all or portions of all the historic buildings on the site. Two of the structures – 639 New York Avenue and 632 L Street – would be

relocated in their entirety to adjacent parcels on the project site to allow for construction of a new building within the center of the site. The new construction would rise to a height of 130 feet (exclusive of penthouse) of approximately 407,000 square feet. The new building would have its primary entrance on New York Avenue; the parking and loading entrance would be on L Street. The applicant's project summary is included below.

Preservation Issues

The project raises several preservation issues that the applicants are working to address, and with which they have been consulting with the HPO. The purpose of presenting this project relatively early in the planning stages is to get the Board's input on these issues:

Demolition

The project includes removal of the rear portions of three of the warehouse buildings on L Street, with retention of the facades for incorporation into the new construction. Several of those buildings have been substantially demolished already: 622-624 and 630 L Street each have essentially no roof or floor structure remaining and are little more than facades. 626-628 L Street has somewhat more structure remaining, but reportedly rear portions of the building are no longer extant. Rear wings of 1027-33 and 1019 7th Street (Lot 34) are also proposed for removal.

EHT Tracerics will be presenting further information on the conditions of these and the other buildings in order for the Board to consider whether the extent of demolition constitutes demolition "in significant part" as defined by the preservation regulations.¹

Building Relocation

Relocating an historic building is not standard preservation practice and is generally discouraged by Federal preservation standards and guidelines. However, while it has not

¹ Work considered demolition under the Act shall include, but is not limited to, any of the following, as determined by the Mayor's Agent:

- a. The removal or destruction of any façade;
- b. The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the structural components of the building, such as structural walls, floor assemblies, and roofs;
- c. The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of the roof along with all or substantially all of one or more exterior walls;
- d. The removal or destruction of all or substantially all of an entire wing or appendage of the building, such as a rear ell, unless the wing lacks physical or historic integrity, or is not a character-defining feature;
- e. The removal or destruction of a substantial portion that includes character-defining features of the building or structure;
- f. The removal or destruction of all or a substantial portion of a designated interior landmark, unless the elements to be removed lack physical or historic integrity, or are not character-defining features; or
- g. Any removal or destruction requiring a partial demolition or raze permit under the D.C. Construction Code, including any demolition of non-bearing walls, interior finishes, or other interior non-bearing elements within a building where an interior space has been designated as a historic landmark.

In general, the determination whether a proposal involves destruction of a building "in significant part" shall depend on the extent to which character-defining historic features, historic or structural integrity, historic materials, or ability to convey historic significance would be lost.

frequently been proposed, the Board has approved relocation as an appropriate treatment in limited instances. In March 2012, the Board approved relocation of 1933-35 9th Street to a site on the same block approximately 50 feet to the south. The solution was deemed appropriate because it reunited the isolated building (surrounded by vacant land) with a row of contributing buildings. For similar reasons, the Board approved relocation of three bungalows in the Takoma Park Historic District (6924 and 6926 Willow Street, and 6949 Maple Street, NW) on the same block and adjacent to other similar properties.

Since being submitted, the HPO has encouraged the applicants to consider an alternative location for 639 New York Avenue. Rather than moving the building west to be adjacent to 649 New York (the original Barker Lumber building), it has been recommended that the applicants study relocating it east adjacent to 621-625 New York Avenue. The rationale for the east location was that it would form a stronger critical mass of historic buildings (rather than isolating 621-625), and that the two structures – a carriage warehouse and livery building – were historically more similar to each other.

Compatibility of New Construction

For the past century, since the first influx of auto-related uses, the New York Avenue corridor has been a transitional zone between downtown and the residential neighborhoods to the north. The Board has recognized this transitional character in its review and approval of five high-rise residential projects in the 400 and 600 blocks, where it accepted a greater than normal disparity between the height of new construction and the spotty remaining historic fabric.² On the opposite side of the avenue, in Mount Vernon Triangle, similar strong contrasts in height are taking shape in projects approved by the Board where smaller historic buildings are being retained and new construction is being developed to the full zoning allowance. In the case of new construction, the Board has been mindful of the test in the preservation law that the Mayor's Agent shall give due consideration to the zoning regulations before making a finding whether the design of the building and the character of the historic district are incompatible.

In its reviews of larger projects adjacent to smaller-scaled historic buildings, the Board has typically encouraged some relief to the mass of the new construction through the use of hierarchy (e.g. a tall central mass with wings that step down), slender proportions and a strong vertical emphasis that relates to similar qualities on the historic buildings, careful study of how the building meets the ground and relates at the pedestrian level to surrounding historic buildings, and how materials and façade organization are used to provide a compatible sense of rhythm, scale and proportion. These principles have been discussed with the applicants, who are continuing to develop the design in response.

One unusual aspect of the proposed design is the use of the undulating “saddlebag” wings on the west and east sides of the new construction which would be built partially over two

² Three of those projects, associated with the redevelopment of the Yale Laundry, are complete. A fourth project for a 12-story apartment building at 465 New York Avenue was approved in concept in 2008 and approval confirmed by the Board in 2010. The Board also approved a 130' tall new construction project at 601 New York Avenue in the subject block in 2005, also not constructed.

of the historic buildings. Compositionally, the lower wings would help to break up the mass of the building and introduce a distinctive, non-rectilinear geometry that could provide an exciting juxtaposition with the historic buildings. At the same time, the saddlebags as proposed would require structural penetrations through the historic buildings to support their weight. The extent of the penetrations (and resulting alteration to the buildings), and the design, setbacks from the street elevations, height above the historic roofs and the overall visual weight of the wings will need to be carefully considered to ensure that they have a compatible relationship with the historic buildings.

The HPO seeks the Board's comments and guidance on the proposal in anticipation of a more complete concept presentation when appropriate.

APPENDIX A
Applicant's Project Summary

DOUGLAS DEVELOPMENT SQUARE 450
655 New York Avenue, N.W.³

HPRB PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction and Background

Douglas Development Corporation (Douglas Development) submits this application for concept review to the Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) for a commercial office and retail building at 650 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. (Square 450, Lots 4, 6, 33, 34, 40, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818 and 821).⁴ The site is bounded by New York Avenue on the south, L Street on the north, and 7th Street on the west. The property is located in the Mount Vernon Square Historic District and includes buildings that contribute to the character of the district.

Description of Project

Douglas Development proposes to construct a 11-story commercial office and retail building that will incorporate 13 historic buildings into the redevelopment. Two historic buildings will be relocated on the site and 11 contributing structures will be rehabilitated. The new building will include a total of approximately 407,706 square feet of gross floor area, or a blended floor area ratio of 7.10 FAR. The height of the building will vary to respect the historic structures on the site but will reach a maximum height of approximately 130 feet. The architect for the project is Shalom Baranes Associates.

The mass of the new building will be centered in the development site, with the main entrance along New York Avenue. The historic buildings along New York Avenue, L Street and 7th Street will continue to convey the qualities of the historic streetscapes and the district. The main mass of the new building is rectilinear in form but includes a large undulating projecting bay at the interior of the square along the western elevation, which projects over the rear portions of some of the historic buildings. The facades of the new structure are treated in glass and metal, and feature terra cotta "fins" to provide architectural interest to the design. Parking and loading facilities will be located along L Street, with entrances located in the facade remnants of what were once auto-related industrial structures.

In addition to historic preservation approvals, Douglas Development will submit an application for zoning relief from the Board of Zoning Adjustment. While the exact areas of relief are still being calculated, the applicant anticipates seeking relief from the minimum requirements for courts, roof structures and extension of a zone boundary line.

³ Originally submitted as 650 New York Avenue, N.W., the proposed address has been changed to 655 New York Avenue, N.W.

⁴ Lots 805 and 821 have been added to the development site since the initial HPRB submission on March 23, 2012.

